



# NEWS RELEASE

## 32ND INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

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### **Halfway point in Iraq: Around the 32nd Brigade**

*Halfway through the 32nd Brigade Combat Team's mission in Iraq, this is an update on some of our units from their locations around the country over the past month.*

***By Lt. Col. Tim Donovan**  
32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team*

BAGHDAD — More than seven months after they entered active duty in the U.S. Army—and now about halfway through the time they will spend in Iraq—the 3,200 men and women of the Wisconsin National Guard's 32nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team are focused on missions ranging from transporting detainees from what was once the largest theater internment facility in the country... to securing forward operating bases... to furnishing a shabby school in Umm Qasr... to transferring Baghdad's International Zone back over to the Iraqi government.

And these are just a few of the brigade's dozens of missions at locations throughout Iraq.

At Camp Bucca in southern Iraq, Wisconsin National Guard soldiers are helping to put the theater internment facility (TIF) there out of business—moving all of the fewer than 800 detainees who remained at Bucca at the end of August to other facilities.

This work includes soldiers of the Appleton-based 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry, along with Alpha and Delta Companies of the 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, which were recently tasked to support the internment facility and to assist with detainee transfers. Alpha Company is in Janesville and Elkhorn, Delta is from Baraboo and Madison.

Beginning in mid-June, about 75 soldiers from Alpha Company have been conducting guard force missions and detainee air transfers. These missions included transporting hundreds of detainees at a time from Camp Bucca to internment facilities in and around Baghdad. Several platoons of the 32nd Military Police Company have also assisted in detainee transfers.

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“The members of 2nd Platoon have received high praise for their professionalism in handling the detainees with dignity and respect while ensuring their safety during the transportation process,” said 1st Sgt. Scott McDonnell of the 32nd MP Co. “They work long and difficult hours to meet this mission but continue to perform the mission with a high level of motivation,” he said.

Soon there will be no detainees left at Camp Bucca after the last of them are transferred by soldiers of the Wisconsin Guard’s 32nd Brigade before the end of September.

Red Arrow soldiers are also involved in determining where detainees can go.

Because detainees currently held in U.S.-run detention facilities will only be transferred to Iraqi facilities that meet minimum international standards, the 32nd MP Company’s 1st and 3rd Platoons are completing assessments to ensure Iraqi prisons meet those standards for prisoner custody and care. The 32nd MP Company is based in Milwaukee and Oconomowoc.

As Camp Bucca’s theater internment facility empties out, many of its transferred detainees will be watched over by other Wisconsin Guard troops at Camps Cropper and Taji near Baghdad.

The 105th Cavalry’s Watertown-based Bravo Troop is one of the Wisconsin units serving at Camp Cropper, near Baghdad International Airport. The approximately 130 troopers rotate between manning entry control points and operating as a quick reaction force (QRF) for Cropper and the western portion of Victory Base Complex. The rotating assignments allow soldiers a change of scenery and a little variety in their duties

“Our QRF periodically conducts exterior patrols of our area of operations outside of Victory Base in order to detect vulnerabilities and become more familiar with the area in the event that they are called to respond to an incident outside the wire,” said 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss of Bravo Troop. “This gives our soldiers some opportunity to see the country and interact a little with the local population. Many of our soldiers enjoy having that opportunity,” Bruss said.

Also serving at Camp Cropper are Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry from New Richmond and Rice Lake, and Stevens Point’s Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery.

“The roles the soldiers have taken on have an important impact on this high-visibility mission,” said Bravo Company’s commander, Capt. Andrew Johansen. “The immediate reaction force (IRF) is the TIF’s mobile security force and is made up of soldiers and Iraqi corrections officers. The IRF Soldiers conduct daily roving missions to ensure the security of the compounds and the perimeter fence and wall have not been compromised.”

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Bravo Battery's executive officer credits "confidence and old-fashioned hard work" for his unit's standard-setting contributions at the Camp Cropper TIF. "Bravo Battery's relentless pursuit of excellence is seen in every task our soldiers perform," 1st Lt. Jesse Losinski said.

"All of these jobs are important to the overall strategic mission in Iraq and will have an impact for years to come," said Bravo Company's Johansen.

Lt. Col. Leland Ward, commander of 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, notes that his battalion's soldiers remain alert to the ever-present dangers of operations in a war zone, but are increasingly focused on their mission of rebuilding the country. Most of the battalion's troops are supporting theater internment facilities or training Iraqi corrections officers.

"Nearing the midway point in the tour, they have conducted missions related to the rule of law in Iraq," Ward said. "Our soldiers continue to take pride in sharing our unit and state heritage. Red arrows and state flags are posted and fly everywhere you find our soldiers," he said.

Red Arrows can also be found in Baghdad, where violent explosions rocked two neighborhoods outside the International Zone on the morning of Aug. 19 and killed more than 100 Iraqis. Many of the victims were employees of the Foreign and Finance Ministries, or were near the government facilities when suicide bombers detonated powerful homemade bombs. Although 32nd Brigade soldiers in Baghdad heard or felt the explosions and saw the smoke plumes, no Wisconsin troops were in danger from the attacks which occurred on the other side of 12-foot concrete blast barriers that separate the International Zone from the rest of the city.

Inside the International Zone, the 32nd Brigade headquarters is operating as Joint Area Support Group–Central, responsible for securing and administering the International Zone and for returning many of the IZ's properties back to the government of Iraq. The JASG–C has already turned over 10 IZ properties to the Iraqi government in the past three months. These include "Believer's Palace," a Saddam Hussein-era underground bunker complex disguised as a palace, along with the former coalition press center and a number of contractor-occupied properties. By the time the Red Arrow troops leave here in January, they will have transferred over many of the remaining properties and nearly 100 more acres to Iraq.

While the 32nd Brigade Headquarters is working to return property to Iraq's government, other units are donating directly to the Iraqi people.

Appleton's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry is on its second tour here, so soldiers and unit leaders knew firsthand what the people of Safwan and Umm Qasr needed to improve their lives and to build a better future for their children.

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As soon as the battalion arrived in Iraq, space in shipping containers was reserved to store donations sent to the unit by soldiers and their families, and from Fox Valley civic organizations, churches and businesses. A half ton of school supplies, clothes, toys, personal hygiene items and first aid supplies has already been shipped and donations are still coming. They will be handed out once Ramadan concludes and school resumes in mid-September. The battalion also helped furnish several poorly equipped schools in the Umm Qasr area. Camp Bucca detainees built 207 desks as part of a vocational training program, and the 2-127th's soldiers delivered them to the schools.

"These items help the Iraqis understand that we are here in partnership with them and to support them," said the battalion's executive officer, Maj. John Oakley. "Our hope is that it will have an effect on reducing the threat level to American service members," Oakley said.

Soldiers of Fort Atkinson's Alpha Troop, 105th Cavalry, see a bit more of Iraq on their security-related mission than most of the 32nd Brigade's troops. In a recent newsletter to families in Wisconsin, 1st Lt. Mark Weigel wrote: "Your sons, husbands and brothers continue to get the job done with style out here in the boondocks. We're supporting our team and maintaining high morale. Our driving routes take us through cities and mountains and we bring our Wisconsin 'can-do' attitude wherever we go."

Weigel says his soldiers had to become a close, family-like team because they are located so far away from other members of the troop. "For the most part, we're self-sufficient," Weigel writes. "But we still make a regular run to the nearest FOB (forward operating base) to pick up packages from home, see a doctor or dentist, shop at an Army PX or withdraw some necessary cash."

Army life—especially in a combat zone—is austere, but Alpha Troop's first sergeant reports in the family newsletter that many soldiers are benefitting from what he calls "the disciplined lifestyle" in Iraq. Even though they get "three squares" a day in great combat zone dining facilities, most soldiers have lost a bit of weight since they left Wisconsin. The Alpha Troop record is held by a soldier who has shed 42 pounds so far.

"Moms, dads, wives, girlfriends...you may not recognize some of your soldiers when we come home," 1st Sgt. Curtis Patrouille warned.

The support deployed soldiers get from the homefront continues to be excellent and much appreciated.

Back home in Watertown, Wis., the local VFW and American Legion posts got together Aug. 11 for a spaghetti lunch at the VFW hall. A care package assembly line was set up, and members of the two veterans services organizations, their auxiliaries, National Guard families and community volunteers worked to assemble, package, label and ship care packages bound for their hometown Guard unit in Iraq.

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In all, 170 of these packages were received between Aug. 23 and Aug. 28. That's more packages than Watertown's Bravo Troop has soldiers.

"They all wanted to do something nice and they wanted to make sure every soldier received a care package," said Bravo Troop 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss in Iraq. "Our mailroom was overflowing for a few days until we could hand them all out," Bruss said.

A month earlier Bravo Troop received two pressure washers acquired and shipped by a small group of Watertown area veterans doing their part to support the hometown troops with something they could use.

While it's not uncommon for soldiers to receive small care packages from their Wisconsin hometowns, friends and families, it is rare for a soldier to get more than 300 pounds stuffed into seven oversized boxes. Sgt. Frank Merola, a news photographer for a major network television operation, was called up from his home in New York City as an Individual Ready Reserve filler for the 32nd Brigade's public affairs section. Merola's co-workers at the network shipped more macaroni and cheese, snacks, books, foot powder, drink mixes, coffee and wet wipes than anyone had ever seen delivered to a single soldier here. Merola shared it all, of course. The downside is that his fellow soldiers have to look at all the Fox News caps, New York Yankees gear and "I 'heart' NY" stuff that now clutters an already cluttered workplace.

The support from home has been great.

Now that September has begun, most of the scorching 120-plus degree summer temperatures are behind the Red Arrow troops here. A 10-day forecast for Baghdad promises temperatures will slowly drift down to a high of only 102 degrees by Sunday. And when daytime highs finally dip below 100 degrees sometime in the weeks ahead, it will be the first time temperatures have not been in triple digits for these soldiers since the 32nd Brigade left Fort Bliss in April.

Now *that* will be bliss.

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NOTE: 25 photos are available (thumbnails on following pages). For most photos, high resolution versions will be available on the Wisconsin National Guard Web site (<http://dma.wi.gov/dma/news/>). Due to the Labor Day holiday in the U.S., availability of these photos on the Web site may be slightly delayed, so they are also available by email here in Iraq ([tim.donovan@us.army.mil](mailto:tim.donovan@us.army.mil)).

## Halfway through Iraq — Photos



A U.S. Marine Corps flag accompanies the Stars and Stripes at a change of command at Camp Bucca, where the 132nd Brigade Support Battalion headquarters now falls under the command of a Marine Corps colonel. Maj. John Reiter is posting the colors while Lt. Col. Leah Moore stands at attention with her battalion. This may be the only time in the history of the 32nd Brigade when Red Arrow units have fallen under the command of an officer from another service. Photo provided by the 132nd BSB.



Spc. Miranda Wilson of the 829th Engineer Company works on an engine at the company's motor pool, located on Camp Stryker, just outside the Camp Cropper gate. Photo provided by the 829th Engineer Co.



Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry meet with local government officials as they plan for the delivery of desks to several schools in the Umm Qasr area of southern Iraq. Photo provided by 2-127th Infantry.



Staff Sgt. Daniel Rockwell keeps a watchful eye on the firing line during one of the many range days for soldiers of Alpha Troop, 105th Cavalry. Photo provided by Troop A, 1-105th Cavalry.



1st Battalion, 128th Infantry soldiers take pride in physical fitness and combat readiness training. During a recent 10 mile race at Victory Base Complex Staff Sgt. Michael Roman, left, and Spc. Jamis Keding hold their Delta Company guidon high as they cross the finish line in 1 hour and 20 minutes—averaging 8 minute miles over the course of the race. Photo provided by Co. D, 1-128th Infantry.

## Halfway through Iraq — Photos



Soldiers from Company A, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion stand in formation at Camp Bucca, where they were detailed to the Camp's theater internment facility (TIF) to conduct detainee guard force operations and detainee transfers. Photo provided by the 132nd BSB.



A centuries-old castle and a U.S. flag formed the backdrop for SGT Theron Kramer's re-enlistment in Alpha Troop, 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry in August. Photo provided by Troop A, 1-105th Cavalry.



Not your normal "beer truck." Because U.S. soldiers are not allowed to possess or consume alcohol in a combat zone, a 5-ton truck crushes beer left behind at a foreign compound formerly occupied by those who don't have such a rule. Alpha Troop, 105th Cavalry reports there wasn't a dry eye on the base as the beer was destroyed. Photo provided by Troop A, 1-105th Cavalry.



Soldiers from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry control a sally port—the main entrance to a theater internment facility at Camp Cropper. Photo provided by Co. B, 1-128th Infantry.



Soldiers from Watertown's Bravo Troop, 105th Cavalry, pose Aug. 23 with a few of the many care packages sent to Iraq by the hometown VFW and American Legion posts. Soldiers are, from left to right, Pvt. Jeremy Jenson, Spc. Daniel Sorensen, Spc. Howard Strum, Pfc. Joseph Cascario, and Spc. Nicholas Pawelski. Photo by 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss.



829th Engineer Company soldiers are photographed with the contents of care packages sent by a Wisconsin business. The photo was taken to thank this company for its support. Photo provided by the 829th Engineer Company.

## Halfway through Iraq — Photos



Soldiers from Troop B, 1st Squadron, 105th Cavalry check the condition of a bridge during a force protection patrol Aug. 21. Pictured are Sgt 1st Class Matthew Texidor, 2nd Lt. Michael Olson, Spc. Ahmed Abdallah, and Sgt. Lee Jones. Photo by 1SG Thomas Bruss.



Sgt. Brad Smith, Portage, supervises the movement of detainees at the theater internment facility on Camp Bucca. The detainees are transferred to other TIFs in Iraq where they will either continue serving their sentence or be released. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure.



Sgt. Joseph Vanbuskirk, a guard with Company A, 132nd Brigade Support Battalion, and a native of Glenbeulah, Wis., keeps an eye on detainees while they are prepared for transfer. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure.



Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry conduct a pre-mission briefing before they begin a nighttime detainee transfer from Camp Bucca. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure.



Sgt. 1st Class Jason Janecek (left), Ashland, 1st Lt. Jacob Heinitz, West Allis (center), and Capt. Anthony Klemme (right), Green Bay, prepare for the convoy to the flight line. Company C, 2-127, is responsible for convoy security during the transfer of detainees from Camp Bucca. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure.



32nd Brigade headquarters soldiers, medical staff and Iraqi government officials conduct a preliminary walkthrough inspection of Baghdad's Ibn Sina Hospital. The hospital, operated by U.S. forces for the past six years, will be turned over to the government of Iraq. U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Tim Donovan.

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32nd Brigade headquarters soldiers, medical staff and Iraqi government officials conduct a preliminary walkthrough inspection of Baghdad's Ibn Sina Hospital. The hospital, operated by U.S. forces for the past six years, will be turned over to the government of Iraq. U.S. Army photo by Lt. Col. Tim Donovan.



Wire mesh and steel bars obscure soldiers of the 32nd Military Police Company as they conduct a cell inspection at a theater internment facility near Baghdad. Photo provided by 32nd MP Co.



Pfc. Kevin Lewis, Kaukauna, mans an M-240B machine gun at one of the guard towers on Safwan Hill. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Tyler Lasure.



Staff Sgt. Joshua Litersky provides security and talks to Umm Qasr school children while other members of 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry meet with the city's mayor and council members. Litersky is assigned to the unit's Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) platoon. Photo provided by 2-127th Infantry.



Soldiers assigned to the escort team for Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 120th Field Artillery pose in front of their sign at Camp Cropper. The escort team physically escorts detainees to and from their compound for medical appointments, visitation, and processing. Photo provided by Btry B, 1-120th FA.



Pfc. Benjamin Pechacek shakes hands with Sergeant Major of the Army Kenneth O. Preston at Camp Cropper in August. Preston is the highest ranking enlisted soldier in the United States Army. Photo by 89th Military Police Brigade PAO.

## Halfway through Iraq — Photos



Photographed through the ballistic windshield of their vehicle, soldiers of Bravo Troop, 105th Cavalry talk with a group of local Iraqi nationals at point they turned around during an Aug. 21 patrol. Photo by 1st Sgt. Thomas Bruss.



Many soldiers keep track of their time in Iraq on their personal computers. One popular program depicts the time left in Iraq as a desert sandstorm, and the time already completed is a tropical island. When the island scene completely replaces the sandstorm—in January—it will be time to come home. This screen shot was taken Sept. 7. And yes, we know Wisconsin in January will look nothing like the tropical island.